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RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2196  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [OAS](#) [GY](#)  
SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANT ELECTORAL REFORM DOUBTFUL  
REF: GEORGETOWN 915

Classified By: Ambassador David M. Robinson

11. (SBU) Summary: Broad national and international consensus says Guyana's August 28 elections were a qualified success. The vote itself was free, fair and transparent; even the losing opposition candidates conceded defeat before the last ballot was counted. But smooth voting and the uncharacteristic peace that followed are unlikely to blunt calls for fundamental electoral reform. Electoral politics here is neither fair nor transparent. Whether the newly returned government will listen remains to be seen, but early indications are not encouraging. End summary.

12. (U) Election day and the subsequent vote count went smoothly and produced a clear majority for the ruling People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and its standard bearer, President Bharrat Jagdeo. Turnout at around 68 percent was low by Guyanese standards but the list of eligible voters itself was flawed and did not take into account massive foreign emigration and internal dislocation. National and international observers found few glitches at polling stations, and none that swayed the outcome. Even opposition leaders conceded defeat before the elections commission finished its count. The atmosphere remained--and remains--calm, an historical first for the usually turbulent Guyana.

13. (SBU) But electoral politics here is neither fair nor transparent and calls for reform qualify the recent success. The government's PPP/C hierarchy controls the media and public purse strings, and uses both to squeeze the opposition and boost its own candidates. Even with a level field, however, voters don't know the candidates they are choosing: members of parliament are picked behind closed doors from party lists after the ballots are counted. There is no accountable link between members and their constituencies; the majority party simply rules by fiat.

14. (SBU) Opposition leaders and the international donor community are vocal about the need for basic electoral reform that opens the system and encourages accountability, and Jagdeo makes the right noises in public and in private about

political inclusion and social outreach. But the current system has been good to the PPP/C, delivering a string of wins since 1992 and gutting its main rival, the largely afro-Guyanese People's National Congress/Reform. After this most recent win, Jagdeo appears positioned to control both the government and his party, effectively consolidating his power in the executive and the legislature.

15. (C) In conversations with the Ambassador and other chiefs of mission from the donor community, Jagdeo attributed his electoral success to a first term record he describes as reformist and inclusive--most observers disagree--and said his new agenda simply would continue the work already started. At the same time, he emphasized the importance of helping PNC/R leader Robert Corbin retain his now badly degraded role as opposition leader and dismissed suggestions that new faces across the aisle might bring energy and innovation to the political arena. A tame cabinet and crippled opposition seem integral parts of Jagdeo's second term game plan.

16. (C) Under the circumstances, the donor community shares the view that Jagdeo will be tough to move toward reform on any significant level. We have been making the rounds separately and together with our donor colleagues emphasizing the need for greater political space and dialogue and the utility of an active parliament and civil society. In the meantime, good elections probably should not be seen as the start of a brave new Guyana, and we should continue to insist on benchmarks and confidence building measures as we contemplate continued assistance during Jagdeo's new term.

Robinson